# WHITE FLOUR, WHITE POWER

## From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York NY 10011–4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org



First published 1998
First paperback edition 2002

*Typeface* Baskerville 10/12 pt.

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*
Rowse, Tim, 1951–
White flour, white power: from rations to citizenship in central
Australia / Tim Rowse.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 62457 6 (hardcover)
1. Australian aborigines – Australia – Central Australia – Government
relations. 2. Rationing – Australia – Central Australia.
3. Australian aborigines – Cultural assimilation – Australia – Central
Australia. I. Title.
GN667.C46R68 1998
306'.089'99150942–dc21 97-51616

ISBN 0 521 62457 6 hardback
ISBN 0 521 52327 3 paperback

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# *Rationing the Inexplicable*

'A gift is indeed both a thing and a kind of act . . .'[1]

## From 'ingratitude' to uncertainty

In his last book on Central Australia, *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, W. Baldwin Spencer made the following observations about Central Australian Aborigines' apparent lack of gratitude:

> It is certainly true that he is not in the habit of showing excessive gratitude on receiving gifts from the white man, but then neither does he think it necessary to express his gratitude when he receives gifts from members of his own tribe, nor does he expect an expression of gratitude when he gives anything away . . . He simply treats the white man as he would a fellow-tribesman.[2]

Note an important assumption in this exonerating account: the flow of goods from whites to blacks can be likened to the flow of goods among Aboriginal people themselves. Goods which pass from one person to another, regardless of the culture of the person, are referred to as 'gifts'. Assuming the sameness of transactions, Spencer suggested that whites who give are like fellow-tribesmen. It was not that Indigenous people were lacking in gratitude. Spencer's use of the term 'gift' allowed him a more positive view. If gifts from white to black and gifts from black to black are treated in similar ('ungrateful') fashion, can we not infer that Indigenous people see the giving white man as a kind of fellow-tribesman? Indigenous recipients treat all donors in the same fashion.

Spencer's reflections on the mores of giving and receiving did not stop there. He continued:

> On the other hand, he parts, as a matter of course, and often for the merest trifle (not only what is a trifle to us but also a trifle to him), with objects that have taken him much labour to produce but which a white man takes a fancy to . . .[3]

In this passage it is the parenthesis which is significant. In order to establish that Aborigines are capable of a generous approach to trading – of indulging a white man's fancy and receiving a mere 'trifle' back – Spencer must assert that both donor and receiver have the same idea of what a 'trifle' is. It is Aboriginal generosity, not their naive overestimation of what, to us, are 'trifles', which we should infer from such apparently unequal exchanges.

To this point, Spencer's observations establish in the reader's mind the possibility that Aborigines and settlers, linked by receiving and giving, have a lot in common. They make similar estimations of the value of things; and the lack of displays of gratitude arises not from any mean-spiritedness, for the Aborigines are capable of generosity, but from an assumption of fellowship. Spencer was here evoking frontier Central Australia's 'moral community', a state of affairs practically embodied in flows of goods between Aborigines and non-Aborigines.

However, Spencer then qualified this evocation, and his words undermined implications of 'moral community':

> It may be added that, taking all things into account, the blackfellow has not any special reason to be grateful to the white man . . . To come into contact with the white man means that, as a general rule, his food supply is restricted and that he is, in many cases, warned off from the water holes that are the centres of his best hunting grounds and to which he has been accustomed to resort during the performances of his sacred ceremonies. While the white man kills and hunts his kangaroos and emus, he is debarred, in turn from hunting and killing the white man's cattle. Occasionally the native will indulge in a cattle hunt, but the result is usually disastrous to himself and, on the whole, he succumbs quietly to his fate, realising the impossibility of attempting to defend what he certainly regards as his own property.[4]

Underlying all transactions there was a gross lack of reciprocity in 'wild Australia', Spencer conceded, for property was being stolen under duress. Indigenous conduct must be read through an interpretive master theme: 'he' is succumbing to 'his' dispossession. Not 'moral community' but land-taking, secured by force.

This passage is a window onto Spencer's moral perplexity, his restless sifting through a series of interpretive possibilities provoked by something powerfully enigmatic – Indigenous 'ingratitude'. Attempting to make sense of these exchanges to his readers, Spencer failed to make sense of them even to himself – at least, no single and stable sense. Within a page, 'moral community' was buoyantly conjectured and clearly refuted. This uncertainty was the outcome of thirty years' reflection.

Spencer turned 34 in 1894, the year he first visited the country of the Arrernte. A graduate of Oxford University, and foundation Professor

of Biology at the University of Melbourne since 1887, he went to the Centre as a biologist for the Horn expedition. Spencer found in evolutionary biology a framework within which to make sense of Indigenous, as well as non-human, life. That is, Spencer's genuine concern for the protection of Australia's Indigenous people was framed within a sense of the evolutionary inferiority of their way of life. Stirling, the expedition's medical officer and anthropologist, was twelve years Spencer's senior and Adelaide born. After medical studies in England, he returned to Adelaide to practise and teach surgery. Like Spencer, he was progressive in politics (both men were committed to women's rights, and to museums and galleries as forms of public education) and fascinated by Indigenous people as part of Australia's natural order. The Horn expedition was Stirling's third foray into Australia's interior. The writings of both men, in the expedition reports, include brief comments on the moral complexity of the relationships of rationing and bartering.

## Rationing and the Horn expedition

It was essential to the Horn expedition's scientific enterprise that its members gave food and other goods to the Indigenous people whom they met. Rationing was becoming a common practice in the region. At Henbury station, Spencer recalls, they saw that

> a large number of blacks were camped out in the sandy bed of the Finke . . . [of whom] the great majority were lying about doing nothing, and perfectly happy because they had enough to eat – a bullock having been just killed, of which they had, as usual, secured the parts not wanted by the white men.[5]

As Stirling explained,

> since the advent of the settler there has been a tendency of the natives to congregate in the neighbourhood of the pastoral stations, where their natural food supply is materially, if intermittently augmented by the refuse of the slaughter yard, or even by gifts of entire beasts.[6]

Accordingly, Stirling was able to report that 'at various points on our journey a considerable number of natives were congregated. Such was the case at Crown Point, Tempe Downs, the Mission Station and Alice Springs.'[7] He elaborated:

> As frequently happens in the dry regions of Australia it is the advantages offered by the presence of permanent water that has been the prime inducement to select a particular locality for a settlement both by whites and blacks, and in the case of the latter, the presence of the white man offers additional inducements in the way of gifts or unconsidered trifles of food.[8]

Stirling bore 'witness to the humanity and even kindliness with which the natives are now treated by present settlers'.[9] These rationed natives were amenable to approaches by the expedition's members. 'So long as food is plentiful they are perfectly happy and contented, their disposition being just like that of light-hearted children who have no idea of anything beyond the enjoyment of the present moment.'[10]

Because of this ration-based accord, the members of the Horn expedition had less reason to fear for their lives, and they were able to buy the cooperation of Indigenous people and to collect artefacts. For example, Stirling noted the difficulty of observing authentic corroborees: 'The nearest approach to the real performance was a dress, or rather undress, rehearsal of it by the Blacks at Tempe Downs, which they undertook after some little persuasion and the promise of rewards by Mr. Thornton.'[11] And, later in the expedition: 'On promise of suitable reward it was arranged that a corroboree should be held at Alice Springs.'[12]

Stirling had begun his report by reflecting on the inadequate conditions for ethnological observation provided by a short visit to the region. Other white men who had not just passed through must know so much that he, Stirling, wished to know, but they had not been writers or keepers of records. How wonderful it would be, he wistfully reflected, to access the memories of 'those early pioneers and settlers who for years lived in close association with the natives at a time when their customs were still uninfluenced by general contact with the Europeans'.[13] Fortunately for Stirling, he did not have to resign himself merely to envy of such 'settlers' knowledge; he was able to make use of information supplied by those who had been rationing Arrernte, Luritja and Arabana peoples – Mr Thornton of Tempe Downs and Mr Kempe of 'the Peake'. When that most helpful of rationers, Francis Gillen of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, turned out to be of literary inclination, he was respectfully afforded space in the Horn expedition report.

That the expedition's ethnological hopes were so dependent on the custom of rationing and its attendant opportunities to purchase cultural goods and services nonetheless disquieted Spencer a little. Rationing was by no means an undiluted benefit:

> The very kindliness of the whites which prompts them to supply clothing and habitation is disastrous to the constitutions of those whose restless and wandering habits lead them to alternate conditions of nakedness, exposure and semi-starvation with those of warmth, shelter and good food.[14]

Nor should the expedition rejoice uncritically in the spectacle provided by the rationed camps they visited. Spencer pointed out that the

expedition took place at a time of abundant natural food, 'exceptionally favourable circumstances'.[15] Accordingly, 'the numbers of blacks congregated around the stations, from whom our observations were made, was smaller than it would have been in a less favourable season', and those most given to hanging around such places were 'the least desirable subjects for observation'.[16]

## The rise of rationing

The rationing relationship was an historic achievement. On a number of Australian pastoral frontiers, the early pastoralists had debated with one another and with the police and government about the best way to manage relationships with Indigenous people.[17] While the aggressive use of arms seemed prudent to many, there were critics who argued that rationing the Indigenous people was better – worth the risk perceived to arise from not being more harsh. Not only did rationing reduce frontier danger, it helped overcome one of the common problems of pastoral enterprise: shortage of labour.

The Horn expedition coincided with the beginnings of the ascendancy of the argument, in Central Australia, that it was better to ration. In South Australia, rationing as a considered technique of frontier government may be said to have begun with Governor Gawler's Queen's Birthday feasts for the Kaurna, commencing in 1839.[18] The practice continued with Eyre's monthly handouts at Moorundie on the Murray River, 1841–4, an experiment which 'facilitated colonial settlement' of the lower Murray.[19] By the 1870s this tradition of official humanitarianism had extended north to Central Australia, via the repeater stations of the Overland Telegraph whose rations 'served a rudimentary social welfare role'.[20]

Hartwig describes as 'piecemeal' and as variously motivated the government practice of issuing rations in Central Australia up to the 1890s. From 1879, the Hermannsburg missionaries were regularly supplied by the government with goods for rationing. Hartwig infers that the government was trying to continue a policy of 'assimilation after segregation'. In 1885 or 1886, the South Australian Protector established a ration depot at Charlotte Waters. Hartwig points to a subsequent shift in government thinking:

> It took drought . . . and considerable pressure from some pastoralists and police in the Centre, the Board of Inquiry in 1890 and the Pastoral Lands Commission (all of whom argued that the issuing of rations would decrease the incidence of cattle killing or that Aborigines were in desperate need of relief) to induce the Minister to establish other depots in Central Australia. By 1894 rations were being issued regularly by the station-masters at Alice Springs, Barrow Creek and Tennant Creek and by the police at Illamurta.[21]

Hartwig's useful summary should not lull us into thinking that the adoption of rationing was smooth and uncontroversial. One of the objectives of his thesis is a precise delineation of the steps in Aboriginal–settler accommodation. He contrasts 'conciliation' with 'pacification'; rations were the key to the first strategy, guns essential to the latter. He describes as mutual 'intelligent exploitation' the relationship made possible by the spread of rationing. Whereas the Lutheran missionaries had pursued a 'careful policy of conciliation from the outset' (1877), pastoralists had commonly embarked on 'pacification'. Hartwig speculates that the Aboriginal preference would have been to establish 'intelligent exploitation' much earlier. Instead, settler aggression in the 1870s and 1880s provoked a phase of Aboriginal 'resistance', including cattle-killing.

Mounted Constable Willshire, whose service in the region began in December 1881, was familiar with the practice of rationing, but he did not explicitly advocate it in his writings. In *The Aborigines of Central Australia*, he referred to '"camps" of semi-civilized blacks in the vicinity of the few and widely separated telegraph and cattle stations', including 'about 200 natives camped regularly at the Heavitree' whose rationing was presumably within his list of duties.[22] His comments on the rationing relationship were mixed. On the one hand, he seemed proud that his stores at Heavitree Gap police depot were not pilfered, 'it being quite sufficient to leave a blackfellow in charge'.[23] On the other hand, he remarked the 'accomplished mendicants' rationed along the Telegraph line, characterising them as 'exceedingly lazy and cunning'.[24] In his comments on the Aboriginal practice of 'beef hunting', widespread in the Alice Springs district, Willshire offered no constructive solution, implying that Aborigines' depredations must be matched with the force, vigilance and cunning which he himself possessed.

Dick Kimber has estimated the results of the 'pacifications' of the mid-1880s: 'It meant that nearly all white people, the Hermannsburg Mission staff and a limited number of Telegraph Station staff excepted, were drawn into a kind of authorised police vigilante role.'[25] Those involved in killing thought that they faced a choice between the survival of their enterprise or the survival of the Aborigines. Between 500 and 1,000 Aboriginal people were killed in the period 1871–94, Kimber estimates. When Francis Gillen complained in 1891 about Willshire's homicidal approach, local and southern pastoralists subscribed money for Willshire's bail and defence by a Queen's Counsel.[26]

According to Hartwig, the 'rule of law' had replaced the 'rule of war' by the early 1890s.[27] By the time the Horn expedition brought Spencer to the Centre, mutual 'intelligent exploitation' was becoming common.[28] He cautions, however, that 'it would be grossly misleading . . . to

assign a date to the general adoption of these practices'.[29] Indeed, Horn's introduction to his expedition's report mentioned the possibility of danger from 'occasionally hostile natives'.[30] That the best way to deal with frontier Aborigines was still controversial in 1894 is also made clear by what Thornton told Stirling:

> In spite of great provocation at Tempe Downs the owner has under great temptation and even peril of his life persistently refused to fire on the marauders even when taken *flagrante delicto*. It is quite true that such forbearance has been deemed injurious to the interests of the district, and not always imitated either in the past or present, but still on the whole the natives are well and kindly treated.[31]

## The transparency and the opacity of exchange

It is clear that Spencer and Stirling were much exercised by whether it was possible to feel empathy with Aboriginal people as fellow human beings. On the one hand, rationing made the native seem normal and convivial; it gave the humanity of the natives a chance to become apparent to the donors of rations. So Stirling felt able to dispose of some white folklore that the native is 'voracious': 'When they are well and regularly fed they eat no more than ordinary people: of this we had ample opportunity of judging.'[32] But something of the unpleasantly exotic was restored to 'the natives' in Stirling's observation of how those camped at Tempe Downs ate their portions of bullock: 'It formed an uninviting spectacle which need not be described here. Everything possible is eaten, even to the skin, intestines and marrow, after more or less baking in the ashes.'[33]

If empathy was so fragile, did the rationing relationship form a platform of growing mutual trust? One of Spencer's stories implied that mutual trust was unlikely to be immediate. On reaching Mount Olga (Kata Tjuta), Spencer's 'black boy' had come across a man, two women and several younger ones who had not seen white men before. Spencer records that

> our provisions were on too limited a scale to allow of anything like extravagance, but a little fat and sugar went a long way towards establishing what, had circumstances permitted of it, would have been on his part a life-long friendship.[34]

Perhaps that was a possibility, but in the meantime the discretion of both sides was to be assumed. After being shown a meagre rock pool by these people, Spencer speculated that it 'is of course quite possible that there were other small pools which the blacks discreetly said nothing about'.[35]

Whether, in the long term, relations of mutual trust and respect could be engendered by rationing was also in doubt. Was there not something fundamentally unresolved about the significance, to both donors and receivers, of the rationing relationship? Here it may be helpful to distinguish rationing – the practice which maintained a 'native' presence near non-Indigenous donors – from bartering, the specific bargains over particular items which the Horn expedition members wished to collect. Bartering is ideally a transparent transaction, in that the equivalent value of the things being exchanged is established to the barterers' mutual satisfaction. Rationing, however, is an issuing of goods for a more complex and ill-defined return. Indigenous people, once rationed, were expected not to attack settlers or their livestock. In a sense (which might not be shared), rations 'purchased' acquiescence to a new, imposed social order.

I do not want to rest too much on this distinction, however. My purpose is rather to throw into doubt the possibility of maintaining clear, mutual understandings of what the passing of goods from person to person was all about. Here I follow Nicholas Thomas' attempt to rethink the history of exchanges in the Pacific during the colonial era:

> The properties of exchange relations derive from broader cultural structures and premises, from inequalities and asymmetries in rights over people, social groups, and their products – and also from the histories which engender cultural and political transformations of notions and relations. Exchange thus mediates conditions and relations that are not, or not wholly, constituted within the immediate frame of exchange.[36]

Even when frontiers are negotiated, rather than violently contested, borders between cultures, there is every possibility of mutual incomprehension. The spread of rationing in Central Australia engendered a moral/political climate in which 'barter' (such as the purchase of artefacts and services by Horn expedition members) became easier to arrange. But neither Spencer nor Stirling was confident that each party to the flows of goods and services shared understandings with the other.

What was the Aboriginal understanding of these transactions? their writings occasionally ask. I, as historian of this frontier, must share their perplexity. Would the Arrernte and Luritja people have recognised my proposed distinction between bartering and rationing? What did they understand to be their obligations, if any, as rationed people? The writings of Stirling and Spencer exhibit a recurring anxiety that the parties to frontier transactions did not have the same ideas about what they were doing.

Noting the dependence of 'outlying runs' on the services of 'black "boys"', Spencer speculated about the likely limits of Indigenous people's understanding of their place in the new order:

> Occasionally there has been trouble with the natives, to whom, in hard times, the sight of cattle must be a great temptation; but by the kindly treatment of them Mr. Thornton has had comparatively little trouble with the aborigines. It is not difficult to realise that it must appear exceedingly strange to the blacks that whilst the white man can shoot down the emus and kangaroos he, the blackfellow, is not allowed to spear the cattle.[37]

Spencer never lost sight of the wider context of non-reciprocity underpinning the rationing relationship. But in this passage he leaves the reader with the impression that this was just one of many things the natives, in their simplicity, were coming to understand. Spencer had at least admitted that the rationing relationship need not be mutually intelligible.

Stirling also commented on the issue of the mutual intelligibility of Indigenous and non-Indigenous notions of property right. He made light of occasional cattle theft in the context of the natives' general willingness to serve:

> With empty stomachs and juicy fat beef close at hand, easily obtainable, and the owners well out of the way, it is no wonder that primitive human nature asserts itself and, whilst recognising the great harm done, it is hard under all the circumstances to blame them too severely. Of actual dishonesty or pilfering as regards ourselves no instance occurred throughout the journey though frequent opportunities offered. Messages were faithfully carried for us often for long distances, and the smallest rewards were cheerfully accepted, especially when they took the form of tobacco of which they are inordinately fond.[38]

The elusiveness of reciprocity and the barriers to mutual intelligibility are evident in Spencer's and Stirling's accounts of several acts of 'barter' for native artefacts. Spencer recalled his surprise that a man was reluctant to trade a necklet which he coveted: 'It was only after some two hours' persuasion and a liberal gift of tobacco that the owner could be induced to part with it.'[39] Stirling shed some light on this protracted bargain by citing Spencer's note on the artefact in question: 'This form contains the hair of a dead warrior and is put on when they "want to fight and kill man dead". If placed near a child it is supposed to do harm. It was parted with reluctantly and spoken of with a whisper.'[40] These ethnological facts seem to me to explain the difficulty of Spencer's transaction in such a way as to give the Indigenous trader

a certain dignity: we can understand him as being concerned at the possible harm which could arise from his trading a dangerous object. Why then did Spencer exclude these pertinent details from his account of the transaction?

It may be that Spencer thought it best that Stirling, the expedition's official ethnologist, be given the task of relating ethnological facts to the readers of the Horn reports. Be that as it may, the effect of Spencer's anecdote was to render inscrutable the man's reluctance to trade, and possibly to hint at his ultimate pliability to the 'liberal gift of tobacco'. The natives are strange, but they have their price. We are thus witness to a contrast between two ways of narrating 'native' behaviour and of ascribing a human logic to their approach to transactions.

I do not wish to imply that Spencer was incapable of explaining in sympathetic and humanising terms the behaviour of Indigenous transactors. He admitted that he coveted

> rather fine Peragale tail tips belonging to [a man's] wife and forming her dress and ornament on special occasions. As his wife was not with him and he had evidently considerable misgivings as to what might happen if without her consent he parted with her belongings, I had great difficulty in persuading him to barter the little bag and its contents and had eventually to part with my sheath knife to secure it.[41]

At first sight, this anecdote seems to reveal Spencer's determination and to carry his implication that, ultimately, the quality of this man's relationship with his wife was of less importance than the consummation of Spencer's desire to collect. The traded knife betokened that relations among Indigenous people could and would be adapted to the force of the new colonial relations of exchange.

However, such a reading should not be privileged as the definitive, corrective account of this reported transaction. We do not *know* the basis of the man's final decision to part with the bag. Was the 'wife' story true? And what construction did this man place on the outcome? Thomas' comment is pertinent to these doubts: 'Evaluations of entities, people, groups, and relationships emerge at the moment of a transaction; subversion can proceed through the assertion of reciprocity in the face of dominance.'[42]

There is a way of thinking about non-western peoples which mitigates the arrogance of non-Indigenous assertions of the will to collect; that is, it is possible to regard Indigenous people as having only a light regard for property. The rationing relationship has offered splendid opportunities for the donors of rations to think in these terms. Spencer wrote: 'If you give a black, say, a woollen shirt you will find him wearing

it one day, his wife will be adorned with it the next time you meet her and perhaps some friend will be wearing it the day after.'[43]

However, such observations did not amount to a stable and generally applicable notion of the Indigenous attitude to material goods. As Stirling acknowledged, there were goods and there were goods:

> One could not also help being struck with the extreme readiness with which, for comparatively trifling returns, they parted with belongings that must have taken much time and labour to produce. To certain exceptional articles, however, they attach extreme value and part from them with the greatest reluctance. Frequently indeed, after a barter, did I experience a prickling of conscience in that it was a one-sided bargain, but I rarely saw an instance where there was any demur at the value offered for the exchange or any jealousy expressed at the idea that one man was getting better value than another.[44]

This is a most interesting and, I suggest, troubled passage. Stirling was admitting to uncertainty about what is fair, about whether 'value' in his terms could be measured against 'value' in the view of his transactors. When the trade was reluctantly agreed to, he attributed to the Indigenous transactor a higher estimation of the 'value' of the artefact. But what was the basis of that Indigenous evaluation? Was it labour time, as Stirling seemed to conjecture? Stirling's knowledge of ethnology (for example, his awareness of Spencer's note on the dangerous necklet) was surely sufficient to make him doubt that labour time was the sole Indigenous criterion of worth. Whatever the bases of their evaluations, Stirling sensed the possibility that bargains could be one-sided. He implied that he would like to know of a cross-culturally sound way of reckoning the value of things. However, not knowing the basis of Indigenous valuation, his final sentence, about the absence of jealousy or any demur throws the Indigenous sense of 'value' back into the realm of the incalculable. The human psychology of possession and desire, as Stirling knew it, did not seem to apply to these people.

Spencer and Stirling were clearly uncertain in what Thomas calls the 'political and cultural construction of agency'[45] – not only in their accounts of specific dealings with Aborigines, but also in their prognoses of the long-term fate of those whose way of life was coming to depend, at least partly, on rationing. Was the very nature of Indigenous agency changing? On the one hand, Spencer could say that

> in contact with the white man the aborigine is doomed to disappear: it is far better that as much as possible he should be left in his native state and that no attempt should be made either to cause him to lose faith in the strict tribal rules, or to teach him abstract ideas which are utterly beyond the comprehension of an Australian aborigine.[46]

Clearly, Spencer was unable fully to dissociate himself from the breach of both his advisory rules. To obtain the objects he coveted he was prepared to contest Indigenous senses of what was proper; and we have it in his own words that he thought Europeans' proprietary notions were 'beyond the comprehension of an Australian aborigine'. But Spencer was not engaging in self-criticism. Rather, in the passage quoted he pointed confidently to others' breaches of his 'leave them be' code – the Lutheran missionaries at Hermannsburg:

> To attempt as has been tried at Hermannsburg and elsewhere to teach them ideas absolutely foreign to their minds and which they are utterly incapable of grasping simply results in destroying their faith in the precepts which they have been taught by their elders and in giving them in return nothing which they can understand.[47]

Stirling was also appalled by what he saw of the fifty people camped at Hermannsburg, over his three to four day stay at the mission: '[N]owhere on our journey did we see natives so dirty in their habits, so squalid in their mode of life, and so devoid of the usual cheery demeanour as at Hermannsburg.'[48] He reported that the missionaries had evidently not improved the locals 'either mentally, morally or physically', but he went on to write as if this was not due to any specific deficiency of the missionaries' approach; it was rather that the natives were unimprovable:

> Even the half-castes brought up from childhood in decent, comfortable, civilised homes and educated up to the point of reading and writing, sooner or later show the same intolerance of, and repugnance to, the restraints of civilisation as the full-blooded blacks, and . . . they are ever prone to relapse eventually into the freedom, licence and squalor of the life of their own race. With many such relapses are periodic; the fit comes upon those who are in the service of the whites; they deliberately leave behind their civilised clothing, join their tribe and resume its ways for a time, returning after a period to seek service with their former masters until once more the restless impulse impels them to go forth into the bush again to have what they call a 'spell'.[49]

Spencer's and Stirling's views were opposed projections of the long-term fate of Indigenous agency. Stirling attested the resilience of their ways: he discerned (or believed frontier folklore which discerned) the incorrigible consistency of their behaviour. Spencer, in contrast, thought that rationing was bringing about irreversible (and, to him, regrettable) change, an evacuation of traditional faiths and dispositions with little likelihood of some new 'faith' or understanding replacing them. The point of view afforded by rationing and bartering was rich in interpretive possibilities.